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THE DAVID IRELAND HOUSE AT 500 CAPP STREET PRESENTS
House of Commons

An exhibition that explores the opportunities and considerations of collective living

March 19—May 31, 2022

(San Francisco, CA, March 3, 2022) Today, cities are struggling to meet the demand for affordable housing, and urban dwellers find themselves starved for low-cost options that allow them to create meaningful social units that provide an alternative to the nuclear family. Nowhere is this more acute than the Bay Area. For San Francisco architecture firm, THE OPEN WORKSHOP, one solution lies in collective living.

House of Commons, a new exhibition at The David Ireland House, presents over thirty-five case studies of past and present collective housing projects primarily in San Francisco and the Bay Area, research conducted by Neeraj Bhatia, Principal of THE OPEN WORKSHOP and Associate Professor at California College of the Arts (CCA), in collaboration with Antje Steinmuller, also an Associate Professor at CCA. In addition, THE OPEN WORKSHOP has developed five speculative designs informed by the lessons of the case studies that are represented through physical models and drawings. A prior iteration of the exhibition was featured at the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale.

“The Bay Area was really the catalyst for this work,” says Neeraj Bhatia, Founding Principal of THE OPEN WORKSHOP. “From overcrowding to rising prices, the inequities to housing access are in an advanced state here in the Bay Area. As designers with an office in one of San Francisco’s most impacted neighborhoods, the Mission District, we wanted to tackle these challenges directly through design—challenges that really stem from our systemic relationship to land, property ownership, and the commodification of the home.”

Bhatia and Steinmuller noticed a preponderance of solutions focused on increasingly tiny, private micro-units that embraced the isolation of the individual. Instead, they looked to the wealth of past and present collective living experiments in the region, which offer people access

to a bigger range and higher quality of resources and amenities as well as new social possibilities that increase the resilience of communities.

Their research was aimed at examining a host of considerations including the spatial structure and organization of shared households, the ways that sharing operates (what is shared, how much and by whom), and the mechanisms of collective governance and labor distribution.

The case studies range widely. Many are established in preexisting structures like San Francisco's **Langton Labs**, a co-living space inside a former sign factory that doubles as an art, science, and technology hacker space; **Chaortica**, part of the **Haight Street Commons** intentional community network, located in a century-old single family residence with a garden and greenhouse; and the **Granada Hotel**, a former SRO hotel, now being converted to permanent supportive housing for the unhoused. Others are new builds such as the **R. Buckminster Fuller-inspired Davis Domes that serve as student housing near UC Davis** and **Starcity: San Jose**, an 18-story downtown mid-rise, part of the Starcity co-living start up with current projects in California and Spain. **Bus Patch**, an off-grid vehicle-based intentional community, is part of a group of rural and peri-urban sites examined as well.

There are several examples from the 60s and 70s when many lessons were learned about communal living including Berkeley's all-female Essex St. Collective and San Francisco's Kaliflower, a commune that was connected to the Cockettes and formed on the principles of common treasury, group marriage, free art, gay liberation, and selfless service.

THE OPEN WORKSHOP's findings are consolidated in five design proposals represented through models and drawings that are on view at the House as part of the exhibition, the installation of which was also designed by the office. Acknowledging that living together is hard, requiring sacrifice, patience, and flexibility, the architects explore how individuals and collectives can be mediated through architecture and reveal new forms of agency and power that are produced when people live together. **The five proposals show a range of techniques on how the private and public realm can be delineated**—wherein architecture supports different social formations. Central to the proposals are the building, maintenance, and governance of a domestic commons, offering meaningful social interaction around shared activities, institutions of culture, care, community, and empowerment.

In tandem with the exhibition, The David Ireland House will display ephemera from its archive that illuminate the architectural concerns of Ireland's work on his home and additional architecture projects, the focus on everyday life, and how basic forms and materials provide innovative ways to see new possibilities.

Bhatia is thrilled to display his firm's work at Ireland's historic home, just blocks from THE OPEN WORKSHOP's offices. "The first time I walked into The David Ireland House, I was struck by the radical domestic experiment that had taken place wherein Ireland had inscribed his way of life into the architecture and interiors," he says. "Collective living is a radical domestic experiment too, and the communities that are doing it share with Ireland a DIY ethos and willingness to really ask, 'How can we redefine the home?'"

"Neeraj Bhatia, Antje Steinmuller, and THE OPEN WORKSHOP open up the boundaries of being architects, artists, and provocateurs," says Lian Ladia, Curator, Exhibitions and Programs, The David Ireland House. "Practitioners like these reflect the ethos of The David Ireland House and of Ireland's work, sharing a respect and sensitivity to the raw nature of the everyday and transforming it into something exciting and thought-provoking."

About THE OPEN WORKSHOP

THE OPEN WORKSHOP is a multidisciplinary design workshop focused on critically re-examining the concept of an open work, first posited by Umberto Eco in 1962. With expertise ranging from architecture to urban design, THE OPEN WORKSHOP uses a multidisciplinary approach to provide innovative, project-specific design solutions. Recognized for its design-research, the office has a record of complex projects that engage multiple systems and stakeholders.

The office has garnered recognition through international competitions, exhibitions, and publications that focus on how design-research can renegotiate the relationship between architecture and its environment. The firm's approach relies on transcalar design techniques that find opportunities to holistically integrate environmental, political, economic and social factors. THE OPEN WORKSHOP is a licensed architectural practice in the State of California, USA and the Province of Ontario, Canada (OAA).

More information at: theopenworkshop.ca @[@theopenworkshop](https://www.instagram.com/theopenworkshop)

About The David Ireland House

The David Ireland House at 500 Capp Street in San Francisco is the historic home turned work of art created by the late, pioneering conceptual artist David Ireland. The House presents exhibitions and educational programs celebrating Ireland's artistic legacy, and hosts collaborative events to strengthen San Francisco's cultural community—bringing together artists, scholars, teachers, students, and the public—as Ireland's home did during his lifetime.

The House is a member of the Historic Artist Homes and Studios program (HAHS) and has been recognized as a Distinctive Destination by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

General Information

For more information, the public may visit 500cappstreet.org or call (415) 872-9240. The David Ireland House at 500 Capp Street is located at 500 Capp St., San Francisco, CA.

Free tours of The David Ireland House (including *House of Commons*) are offered Fridays at 2pm and 4pm. Reservations can be made online. Free self-guided, drop-in visits are welcomed on Saturdays 12-5pm without reservations. Currently, masks are required. Check the website for updates on COVID policy.

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